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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

Ministerial round table: Gender pay gaps in the public and private sectors: how can equal pay for work of equal value be achieved in the changing world of work?

Chair's summary

1. On 13 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Gender pay gaps in the public and private sectors: how can equal pay for work of equal value be achieved in the changing world of work?", under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The participants exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices on the subject, with an emphasis on national laws, policies, programmes and regulations to reduce the gender pay gap, as well as gender-based discrimination in the labour market and occupational segregation. Participants also highlighted effective measures to promote a better work-life balance.

2. Ms. Elke Ferner, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of the German Government, chaired the round table and made an opening statement before the beginning of the dialogue. Ministers and high-level officials from 25 Member States made interventions at the round table, and the dialogue concluded with remarks by the Chair. Yannick Glemarec, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), made closing comments.

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Effective national laws, policies, programmes and regulations that have helped to reduce gender pay gaps

3. Participants described a wide range of national laws, policies, programmes and regulations that have enabled their countries to narrow the gender pay gap. The need for structural and holistic approaches to tackle the root causes of gender differentiation in pay was emphasized as a lesson learned by several participants. Many participants also stressed the link between efforts to close the gender pay gap with those to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development more broadly, citing interlinkages between women's economic empowerment and economic growth. Institutional arrangements such as governmental audits and the establishment of committees empowered to deal with wage discrepancies were described as useful tools to narrow the gender pay gap. Several participants also underscored the importance of partnerships between Governments and non-governmental actors.

4. Participants highlighted that Governments should not limit their work to legislative measures: raising awareness about the gender pay gap, confronting gender-based stereotypes that influence labour market choices and outcomes, and providing both public and private sector employers and other relevant actors, such as trade unions, with incentives and instruments to measure and monitor pay gaps were described as three key steps towards ensuring equal pay for work of equal value. Participants highlighted that structural macroeconomic policies have a stronger impact on gender equality when they take into consideration the gender-segregated nature of the labour market and specifically target domestic and care workers, pregnant women and single-headed households. Several participants emphasized the importance of strong parental leave policies that provide women with employment security, as well as larger pensions, which benefit societies more broadly. The meaningful integration of the role of fathers in order to change the stereotypes held by employers, which could lead to gender-neutral hiring processes, was also part of the discussion.

Measures to ensure that women are paid the same as men for work of equal value in the private sector

5. Several participants noted that the gender pay gap tends to be wider in the private sector than in the public sector. Ministers shared best practices on intersectoral, sectoral and company-level measures to bridge the gender pay gap in the private sector, including: setting specific gender equality objectives, such as equal opportunities programmes; or setting targets for women's representation on boards of directors, including through the use of special measures. Several ministers pointed out that, to the extent possible, the public sector should support the efforts of businesses to close the pay gap, while underscoring the importance of sanctions for private companies that discriminate in hiring between women and men.

6. Transparency in pay structure by level and sex, between employers and their employees and across sectors, was identified by several participants as an important tool in closing the gender pay gap because it can be an effective incentive for companies to take positive action. Measures to address the gap include: providing childcare facilities; establishing a legal obligation for companies to publish a gender equality plan; and offering government training and other services to micro- and

small enterprises on how to narrow the pay gap. Several ministers indicated that the existence of a minimum wage tends to affect women more than men, and that establishing a minimum wage or raising it can contribute towards narrowing gender pay gaps.

Measures to eliminate gender-based labour market discrimination and occupational segregation and to promote better work-life balance

7. Several participants noted that the gender pay gap is linked to gender-based discrimination and occupational segregation, both of which are rooted in gender-based stereotypes that influence women's and men's education and employment choices. Legislative interventions accompanied by advocacy efforts to encourage boys and girls to make non-traditional choices in education can boost women's participation in new scientific and technological fields and in other sectors of the labour market that tend to be more highly remunerated and dominated by men, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the armed forces or the diplomatic corps. National programmes to encourage men and boys to pursue education and employment in areas more traditionally dominated by women, such as health care, were also cited as ways to eliminate gender-based labour market segregation.

8. Participants underscored the need to promote a better work-life balance, particularly for women, who tend to spend more time carrying out unpaid care work. They identified promoting options and the right to more flexible working arrangements, including home-based work, as key components for supporting a good work-life balance. The recognition of the gender gap inherent in the responsibility of unpaid care work, and the implementation of measures to bridge it, was described as an important contribution towards the elimination of gender-based discrimination in the labour market and to the instilling of a culture of equality of treatment in decision-making and the promotion of a work-life balance for all.